

## PRESS RELEASE



# The Cleveland Museum of Art

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### LAST WORKS OF PHILIP GUSTON ON EXHIBIT AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Thirty-four paintings and drawings done by the American artist Philip Guston during the year before his death in June, 1980, will be exhibited at The Cleveland Museum of Art from June 6 through September 13, 1981. Philip Guston: The Last Works represents the final stage in the career of an artist who began as a figurative painter, became a leading abstract expressionist, and then stunned the art world by returning to a representational style of painting. The exhibition was organized by Willem de Looper, associate curator of The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

The very personal images of Guston's last works--including shoes, garbage-can lids, canvas stretchers, ladders, teapots, and dismembered legs--can be recognized as elements from earlier figurative paintings, but now they are drawn in a coarser cartoon-like style that recalls the artist's earliest artistic training--a correspondence course in cartooning--and his fascination with the "Krazy Kat" cartoons. Although at first glance these works seem like a radical departure from Guston's abstract paintings, critics have pointed out that vague images had begun to appear in his abstractions and that the interaction of shapes and colors in the last works emerges directly from the abstract expressionist paintings.

Born in Montreal, Canada, in 1913, Philip Guston grew up in Los Angeles, where he was a high-school classmate of Jackson Pollock. He studied briefly

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at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, but was largely self taught. He was most interested in the works of Piero della Francesca, Giorgio de Chirico, and Picasso, particularly the way in which these artists dealt with the problems of spatial organization in their works.

In 1934 he traveled to Mexico to seek work with the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros and in 1935, at the urging of his brother and Jackson Pollock, moved to New York City to join the Federal Arts Project of the Works Project Administration. His most important project for the WPA was a mural completed in 1941 for the Queensbridge Housing Project on Long Island.

While in New York he became acquainted with the work of cubist and abstract artists, and although his works began to exhibit a more abstract organization, he continued to paint in a representational style. Between 1941 and 1947, while he was artist in residence at the University of Iowa and Washington University in St. Louis, he painted a number of lyrical figure paintings which were immediately popular and enhanced his reputation. He received a number of awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Prix de Rome.

In 1950, following a year in Europe studying the works of the old masters he loved, he returned to New York City. He had been moving in the direction of abstract painting for some time, and now, in the company of a circle of artists that included Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman, he fully committed himself to it.

In 1951 he had his first one-man exhibition of abstract paintings in New York. Most critics, who had liked his figurative paintings, were shocked by the change in his work. Red Painting, exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in the same year, aroused considerable controversy among artists and critics and was denounced by some for its almost complete destruction of visible forms or defined color shapes. This work was followed by a number of lighter-keyed

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paintings, the so-called "White Paintings" whose short, hatched brush strokes and luminous painting earned Guston the designation of "abstract impressionist."

By the mid-1950s Guston was moving toward a more aggressive style of painting, characterized by rougher textures, broader brush strokes, and irregular colored shapes interacting with one another. Guston's work was now being received enthusiastically by critics and he began to enjoy financial success. His paintings were featured in the Sao Paulo Bienal and the Venice Biennale, among other exhibitions, and in 1962, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum organized a retrospective of his work which was exhibited internationally.

When Guston showed paintings of recognizable objects at New York's Marlborough Gallery in 1970, the art world that thought of him as a leading abstract expressionist was once again confounded. As his new work gained acceptance, Guston continued to receive artistic and academic honors. He was appointed University Professor of Art at Boston University in 1973 and Professor Emeritus in 1978. A major retrospective, organized before Guston's death by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, will open in late June, 1981 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

Philip Guston: The Last Works is installed in the prints and drawings galleries on the Museum's ground floor. A small catalog of the exhibition can be purchased for \$4 at the Museum's Sales Desk.

Gallery talks in the exhibition will be given at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, July 22, and Sunday, July 26. A film, in which Philip Guston traces the evolution of his painting style, will be shown in the Museum's Recital Hall at 12:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 1.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.